

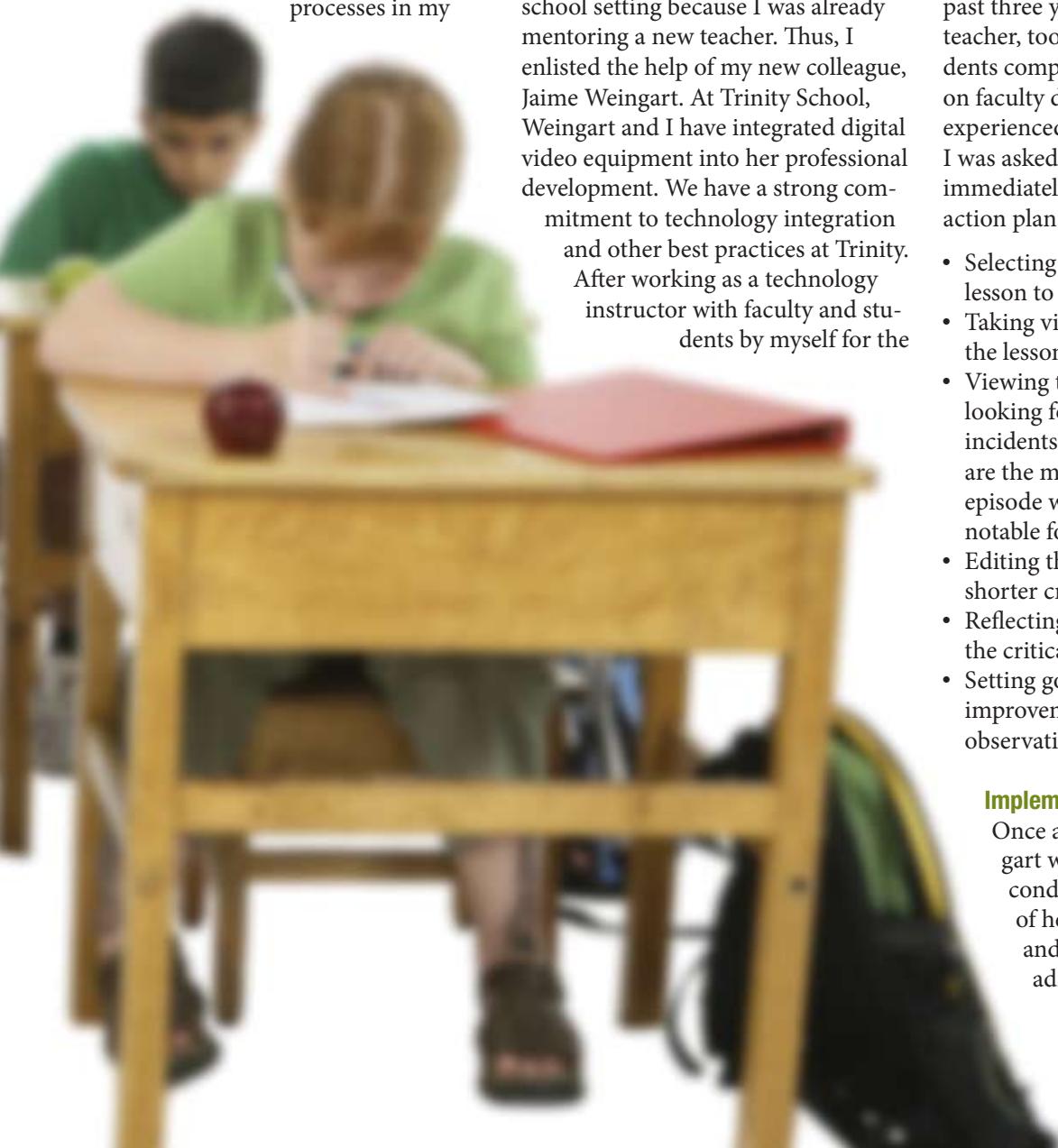
Another View on Mentoring

By Anissa Lokey-Vega
and Laurie Brantley-Dias



From the time that computer technology became part of the school environment, teachers have been encouraged to integrate technology into their instructional practices. Why not use such valuable tools to extend professional development practices as well? This is a question that Laurie Brantley-Dias and I raised while working together on digital video staff development training for faculty at Georgia State University. We decided that it would be a good idea to try out some of our ideas and processes in my

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school setting because I was already mentoring a new teacher. Thus, I enlisted the help of my new colleague, Jaime Weingart. At Trinity School, Weingart and I have integrated digital video equipment into her professional development. We have a strong commitment to technology integration and other best practices at Trinity.

After working as a technology instructor with faculty and students by myself for the

past three years, Weingart, a first-year teacher, took over teaching the students computer skills so I could focus on faculty development. As a more experienced colleague in this setting, I was asked to serve as her mentor. We immediately put together a mentoring action plan. The plan included:

- Selecting and planning a target lesson to evaluate
- Taking video of her implementing the lesson
- Viewing the video together, looking for two or three critical incidents in the lesson. These are the moments during a teaching episode when something was notable for the novice teacher
- Editing the video to these shorter critical incidences
- Reflecting on and discussing the critical incidences
- Setting goals for performance improvement based on the observations and reflections

Implementing the New Method

Once a plan was in place, Weingart was on board—under one condition. She wanted the video of her lesson to stay between us and not fall into the hands of administrators. I agreed.

After we decided to give this mentorship method a try, Weingart developed a lesson that excited her. Once she had

her plan on paper, we sat down and discussed how she envisioned teaching the lesson. We made sure her plan had all the pieces we felt it needed, including examples of best practice. She was proud to discover her lesson incorporated technology integration, inquiry, and cooperative learning. With her plan in place, we set a date and time to record her classroom in action.

The big day arrived. With Weingart's help, I set up the video camera in the back of her classroom. We turned off the automatic focus and manually focused the camera on her, just in case any students' hands went up in front of the camera. We zoomed out to the camera's wide-angle setting so we could capture as much student interaction as possible. It was also important to double check that the camera's microphone was working properly. With the equipment set up and the camera rolling, Weingart began her lesson.

After the lesson was over, Weingart exuded confidence and talked about the success of the lesson. We talked about the pieces that went well and the things she thought might be interesting to view on the video. We were both looking forward to our next meeting, when we would watch the video together.

A week later, we met to watch the video. While studying herself in the video, Weingart's initial attitude of confidence quickly switched to one of disappointment. She began to excessively criticize herself. For the first time in this new process she needed me, as the mentor, to serve as her encourager. After redirecting her to find the things she was doing well, she began to be more balanced in her self critique.

Weingart picked two critical incidences on which she wanted to reflect. I selected a third. By having Weingart select incidences, I was hoping

to gain her buy-in to any goals that might come from this process. More important, I wanted her to learn how to critically examine her own practice. By selecting one event myself, I was able to direct her in a path I thought would be most appropriate for her professional development.

Because Weingart's video was more than 45 minutes long, we decided to shorten the video to three critical incidences, editing it to approximately six minutes. The edited video would allow us to quickly find and review the pieces of her lesson we were most interested in discussing.

To edit Weingart's video, we used iMovie, a free video editing package that comes with current Apple computers. We found that the software was relatively easy to use and did not interfere with the efficiency of the mentoring process. Other free or relatively inexpensive video-editing options include Pinnacle Studio or

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Microsoft's MovieMaker. We both kept a CD-ROM of the six-minute video.

Within a week of creating the edited video, Weingart reflected on the two critical incidences she had chosen. To do this, she described in writing the incidents in detail, her emotions toward each one, why each incident was important to her, and any changes she would make in the future. This became her reflection protocol.

She shared her reflections with me at our next meeting. Afterwards, Weingart and I jointly reflected on the third incident in a similar fashion. At first, she interpreted the classroom interaction as insignificant. Therefore, I asked her to describe the event in detail as it unfolded on the video. This process guided her reflection to yield insights that mirrored my own. We discussed why I selected the incident, what her instructional intentions were, why the event occurred, what could be improved, and together we decided on an instructional goal for Weingart. The reflection protocol gave Weingart a new perspective into her practice, facilitating her own professional development.

Outcome

Following the video reflections, Weingart and I met for a fourth time to discuss our thoughts about the process of using video for her professional development. During our discussion we identified three benefits achieved by using video that were not achieved by traditional methods of mentor observation.

First, not only was it clear to me, but it was also evident to Weingart that she was able to use the video clips and reflection protocol to make a more objective analysis of her instruction instead of relying on her emotions and memory to judge the quality.

Second, because the video and reflection protocol allowed Weingart to be more reflective and objective about

her lesson, she was able to identify problems that occurred within her lesson without requiring me to state them. In the case that she was not able to analyze a critical incident on her own, I was able to select and use an edited video segment to guide our conversation about a particular instructional practice. Through this process, Weingart was able to receive emotional support as well as instructional feedback from me without feeling frustrated and discouraged.

Third, Weingart surprised me with her newfound confidence. She actually wanted to share her video of critical incidences with our supervisor as evidence of her ability to identify strengths and weaknesses to set more meaningful goals.

Recommendations

This method proved to be significantly beneficial for mentoring. The following is a summary of the steps we took to ensure a more seamless process:

Review Two or Three Critical Incidents. Three incidents are really the very most that can be reasonably reviewed. Two may be ideal in keeping novices from being overwhelmed. It promotes quality goals over quantity, assuring only meaningful goals are established.

Use Easy Editing Software. Luckily, we had selected user-friendly video editing software. Had this technology been too cumbersome, our associated frustrations may have detracted from the value of the mentoring process.

Allow Enough Time. Just like the traditional methods of mentoring, this process requires time. For Weingart and me, this process required three meetings lasting as little as 30 minutes

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or as much as 90 minutes. However, to our benefit, we were already familiar with the technology, thus minimizing the time requirement.

Conclusion

To effectively mentor beginning teachers, you must provide emotional support as well as feedback on their instructional practices, two things that sometimes clash in what we call the friendship barrier. More important, as mentors, we should foster their growth in a way that enables them to reflect on and make meaning of their own practice. As a solution to our friendship barrier, Weingart and I used digital video in conjunction with a reflection protocol to help her develop as a reflective practitioner. We think it is a very successful and easily replicated model.

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